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SUBJECT: MERKEL GIVES CREDENCE TO BIOPIRACY CLAIMS AHEAD OF CBD
COP-9 CONFERENCE

¶1. SUMMARY: Biodiversity was the theme of the CDU/CSU caucus conference of the German Bundestag, held April 9 in Berlin. In a keynote address German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she expects the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) Conference of the Parties (COP-9) will send a clear signal on the need to protect biodiversity worldwide. Merkel gave credence to biopiracy concerns, which charge that pharmaceutical companies unethically privatize indigenous knowledge. Developing country representatives expressed hope that the conference will be the starting point for a "Bonn Protocol" on world biodiversity. END SUMMARY.

¶2. At the CDU/CSU caucus conference of the German Bundestag, Chancellor Merkel focused on the importance of forming international and national alliances -- comprised of scientific, political, private sector, indigenous and local community stakeholders -- for the protection of biodiversity. The goal, she said, should be to work for the protection of species that are threatened with extinction as the result of human actions. Merkel said she expects that COP-9, which will take place May 19-30 in Bonn, will deliver concrete results and programs to help developing countries find solutions for problems such deforestation or biopiracy. The term biopiracy refers to the patenting of knowledge and genetic resources developed by indigenous communities without authorization by or compensation to such groups.

¶3. The President of the Republic of Madagascar, Marc Ravalomanana, said that developing countries are aware of the social and economical risks of biodiversity loss. While such countries know about the importance of protecting the environment, they often cannot afford to do so. He criticized industrialized countries for not doing enough to combat biopiracy and claimed it is immoral to patent "their" property -- particularly indigenous biomedical knowledge about species -- without compensation to the local groups who originally developed such knowledge. The primary challenge, Ravalomanana said, is to make environmental protection economically sustainable. He also pointed out that biodiversity needs a protocol similar to the Kyoto Protocol with clear regulatory measures, voluntary measures, and economic incentives. He expressed hope that the May conference would be the starting point for a "Bonn Protocol" on world biodiversity.

¶4. Columbian Vice President Francisco Santos and Meena Raman, President of Friends of the Earth International, highlighted the urgent need to create a regime to distribute generic resources in a fair way and, most importantly, to find financial instruments to support the protection of biodiversity in developing countries. Both spoke against biopiracy, stressing the importance of sustainable production, in which no forest is destroyed for the profit of "rich" countries.

¶5. COMMENT: Merkel will address the High-Level Segment of the COP-9 on May 28. Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel and EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas will present an "Economics of

Ecosystems and Biodiversity" report on May 29. This report is modeled after the Stern Review on climate change and will calculate the economic costs from dwindling species.

TIMKEN JR.